

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY QUITO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8780

INFO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 QUITO 0664

E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: FIRST STEPS OF NEW GOVERNMENT AND ECUADOREAN REACTIONS

REF: A) QUITO 0266 B) QUITO 0376 C) QUITO 0378

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: THE VARIOUS SECTORS OF THE ECUADOREAN PUBLIC HAVE REACTED WITH MILD FAVOR TO THE JAN. 11 CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT, THE COMPOSITION OF THE NEW CABINET, AND THE STATEMENTS AND ACTIONS OF THE SUPREME COUNCIL DURING ITS FIRST DAYS OF RULE. THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S FIRM BUT CONCILIATORY ATTITUDE AND ITS PLEDGE FOR AND ACTIONS TOWARD A RETURN TO CIVILIAN AND CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY WELL RECEIVED. AS THE SUPREME COUCIL BEGINS TO DEAL WITH SPECIFIC PROBLEMS AND ISSUES, HOWEVER, REAL LEADERSHIP AND UNITY WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES WILL BE NECESSARY TO KEEP THE SOCIAL PEACE. END SUMMARY

2. THE SUPREME COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENT, IN ITS SELECTION OF WSNEW CABINET CHOSE TO RETAIN THE PREDOMINANTLY MILITARY COMPOSITION ESTABLISHED BY THE RODRIGUEZ GOVERNMENT. THE ECONOMIC TEAM APPOINTEES SEEM SOLID AND, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE MINISTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES, APPEAR COMMITTED TMAA MODERATE ECONOMIC POLICY.

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3. THE SUPREME COUNCIL HAS ACTED POSITIVELY AND AFFIRMA-

TIVELY TOWARD ESTABLISHING ITS LEADERSHIP DURING ITS FIRST DAYS IN OFFICE. IT HAS STATED ITS DESIRE FOR RECONCILIATION AMONG ALL ELEMENTS OF SOCIETY, ITS INTENT TO OPEN DIALOGUE WITH ALL SECTORS OF SOCIETY, A COMMITMENT TO BE FORCEFUL IN THE MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC ORDER, AND HAS PROMISED TO RETURN THE COUNTRY TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT WITHIN A PERIOD OF TWO YEARS, A PERIOD THAT MAY BE SHORTENED IF "CONDITIONS PERMIT." THE SUPREME COUNCIL, AS EARNEST OF ITS STATEMENTS, HAS DECLARED AMNESTY FOR MOST OF THE MILITARY OFFICERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE SEPT. 1 COUP ATTEMPT, AS WELL AS FOR BANISHED CIVILIAN OPPOSITIONISTS, APPOINTED A CIVILIAN GOVERNOR AND PROMISED DESIGNATION OF OTHER CIVILIAN GOVERNORS, PLEDGED THAT MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD AS A STEP TOWARD FULL RESTORATION OF CONSTITUTIONAL RULE, AND, WHILE DECLARING AN OPEN DOOR POLICY TO ALL SECTORS, HAS DEALT FIRMLY WITH A STUDENT AND LABOR DEMONSTRATION. FOLLOWING ARE SUMMARIES OF THE RESPONSES TO THE NEW GOVERNMENT BY VARIOUS SECTORS OF SOCIETY.

4. EDITORIALS AND NEWSPAPER COLUMNISTS.

EDITORIALLY, THE DEPARTURE OF FORMER PRESIDENT RODRIQUEZ LARA WAS SCARCELY MENTIONED AND LAMENTED NOT AT ALL. EDITORIAL COMMENT IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT URGED A SPEEDY RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL RULE AND IMMEDIATE ATTENTION TO THE NATION'S ECONOMIC NEEDS. THERE IS LITTLE EDITORIAL CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF EXCEPT FOR ITS BRIEF IMPOSITION OF PRESS CENSORSHIP.

5. SOME EDITORIAL COLUMNISTS HAVE BEEN CRITICAL, HOWEVER.

ALFREDO PINOARGOTE, WRITING IN EL UNIVERSO ON JAN. 20 SAID THAT MILITARY MEN WHO HAD TASTED POW WERE NOW RETURNING TO COMMAND UNITS, RAISING THE POSSIBILITY OF "BOLIVIANIZATION" OR A STEADY SUCCESSION OF MILITARY DICTATORS. BENJAMIN ORTIZ OF EL TIEMPO ON JAN. 14 LIKENED THE CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT TO A TEAR-GAS GRENADE THAT CLEARED THE STREETS BUT DID NOT ELIMINATE THE BASIC PROBLEM, AND SAID THE ONLY HOPE FOR SOLUTION WAS A PLURALISTIC SYSTEM THAT ELIMINATED THE VICES OF

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PREVIOUS SYSTEMS. ANYTHING ELSE, HE SAID, WOULD REQUIRE EVER MORE RIGID DICTATORSHIPS TO MAINTAIN STABILITY. OTHER COLUMNISTS ALSO HAVE EXPRESSED PESSIMISM ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THEIR COUNTRY UNDER MILITARY RULE.

6. ANNOUNCEMENT OF A NEW CABINET BROUGHT SURPRISINGLY LITTLE SPECIFIC COMMENT IN THE NATION'S EDITORIAL COLUMNS. EL TIEMPO, THE LEADING CRITIC OF GENERAL

RODRIQUEZ, SAID IN ITS JAN. 17 LEAD EDITORIAL THAT ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES OF THE NEW CABINET WERE "PROMISING," BUT AWAITED DEEDS TO FOLLOW THE WORDS. EDITORIALS AND COLUMNISTS' COMMENTS HAVE BEEN CAUTIOUSLY FAVORABLE ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S DECLARATIONS OF A DESIRE FOR DIALOGUE, ITS EXTENSION OF AMNESTY, APPOINTMENT OF CIVILIAN GOVERNORS, PLEDGE FOR MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, AND, FINALLY, RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL RULE WITHIN TWO YEARS.

7. POLITICAL PARTIES.

MOST PARTIES' SPOKESMEN HAVE SAID THAT THEY DO NOT REGARD THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT AS NEW, BUT RATHER AS A CONTINUATION OF THE RODRIQUEZ MILITARY GOVERNMENT. MOST CONTINUE TO EXPRESS THE DESIRE FOR A RAPID RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE. THERE HAS BEEN GRUDGING APPROVAL OF THE GOE'S DECLARATIONS ON LOCAL ELECTIONS AND THE EXPRESSED INTENTION TO TURN OVER THE GOVERNMENT BY THE END OF 1977. THERE HAS BEEN NO POLITICAL PARTY CRITICISM OF THE RODRIQUEZ OUSTER. THE COMMUNIST PARTY HAS ISSUED A MANIFESTO WHICH OFFERS IMPLICIT SUPPORT TO THE NEW GOVERNMENT SO LONG AS IT MAINTAINS THE POLICY OUTLINES OF THE RODRIQUEZ GOVERNMENT. ALL IN ALL, THE PARTIES SEEM TO SHARE THE VIEW THAT THOUGH THE NATURE OF THE GOVERNMENT HAS NOT CHANGED, THE NEW LEADERS MIGHT BE SINCERE ABOUT RESTORING CIVILIAN AND CONSTITUTIONAL RULE RELATIVELY RAPIDLY, AND THAT THEIR SINCERITY SHOULD BE TESTED AND SPECIFIC PLANS HEARD BEFORE RENEWAL OF CAMPAIGNS OF PUBLIC CRITICISM.

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8. THE CHURCH.

SHORTLY FOLLOWING THE CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT BOTH THE ARCHBISHOP OF GUAYAQUIL, BERNARDINO ECHEVERRIA, AND THE ARCHBISHOP OF QUITO, PABLO MUNOZ, ISSUED STATEMENTS. ALTHOUGH NEITHER TOOK A POSITION IN OPPOSITION OR SUPPORT OF THE RECENT CHANGES, THEY AGREED THAT THE COUNTRY WAS UNDERGOING HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT MOMENTS THAT CAN HAVE LONG-RANGE CONSEQUENCES ON ECUADOR'S POLITICAL LIFE. BOTH URGED POLITICAL RESTRAINT AND HARMONY SO THAT ALL ECUADOREANS COULD WORK TOGETHER TO RESTORE POLITICAL NORMALITY, I.E., CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT.

9. STUDENTS-LABOR.

THE FEDERATION OF ECUADOREAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS (FEUE) ANNOUNCED JAN. 20 THAT THEY GAVE UNCONDITIONAL SUPPORT TO THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTION PLANS. THE CAUTIONED, HOWEVER, THAT THEY SUPPORTED PLANS AND NOT ANY PARTICULAR REGIME. IN QUITO THE STUDENTS WERE JOINED BY COMMUNIST WORKERS IN A MARCH ON THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE JAN. 20 THAT WAS BROKEN UP BY THE POLICE. LATER, MARCHERS' REPRESENTATIVES MET WITH THE SUPREME COUNCIL, WHICH SAID THAT CONSULTATIONS WERE WELCOME BUT THAT THE GOE WOULD NOT CONCEDE TO PRESSURES FOR ACTION INCONSISTENT WITH GOVERNMENTAL PLANS AND OBJECTIVES. CONFIDENTIAL

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PUBLIC AND COLUMNISTS' REACTION TO THE GOVERNMENTS HANDLING

OF THIS PROBLEM HAS BEEN ONE OF RELIEF AND SATISFACTION. THE REACTION OF STUDENTS AND LABORERS IYRSFFICULT TO ASSESS. THEIR CLAMOR AGAINST INCREASING COSTS STRIKES A SYMITTHETIC CHORD, AND THEY SOON MAY FEEL COMPELLED TO TEST THE GOVERNMENT'S RESOLVE AGAIN.

10. THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY.

IT HAS OFTEN BEEN SAID THAT THE POWERFUL GUAYAQUIL BUSINESS GROUP CARES LITTLE WHAT GOVERNMENT SITS IN QUITO AS LONG AS IT DOES NOT INTERFERE WITH ITS EARNING MONEY. MOST BUSINESS LEADERS BOTH IN QUITO AND GUAYAQUIL HAVE APPARENTLY ACCEPTED THE CHANGE AND ARE ADOPTING A WAIT-AND-SEE ATTITUDE TOWARD THE SUPREME COUNCIL. THE GUAYAQUIL GROUP IS WELL REPRESENTED WITHIN TKS ECONOMIC TEAM OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT, AND BUSINESSMEN SEEM RELATIVELY CONTENT WITH ALL BUT RENE VARGAS, THE MINISTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES. IF THE GOE MAINTAINS MODERATE ECONOMIC POLICIES AND PROVES ITSELF CAPABLE OF AN ACCEPTABLE LEVEL OF ADMINISTRATIVE

EFFICIENTY, IT HAS LITTLE TO FEAR FROM THE BUSINESS
COMMUNITY.

11. THE PUBLIC.

THE MAN ON THE STREET JAN. 11 WAS MORE INTERESTED IN AN
IMPORTANT SOCCER GAME THAN IN THE NEWS COVERAGE ABOUT THE
NEW GOVERNMENT. ORDINARY LIFE WAS NOT DISRUPTED BY THE
CHANGE AND, TO ALL APPEARANCES, LIFE GOES ON AS BEFORE.
THE PUBLIC APPEARS STILL POLITICALLY APATHETIC ALTHOUGH
PREOCCUPIED WITH STRETCHING INCOMES TO REACH RISING PRICES.

12. COMMENT: THE SUPREME COUNCIL APPEARS TO BE CONDUCTING
ITSELF WELL INITIALLY AND HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN
COMMUNICATING THE IMAGE OF DECISIVENESS. THE APATHETIC
PUBLIC AND THE MORE POLITICALLY ACTIVE SECTORS OF SOCIETY
SEEM READY TO GRANT THE NEW GOVERNMENT A GRACE PERIOD IN
WHICH TO PROVE ITSELF. ONE COULD NOT DESCRIBE THE CURRENT
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ECUADOREAN PEOPLE AND THEIR
GOVERNMENT AS A "HONEYMOON," BUT THE AGITATION SO EVIDENT
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WITHIN THE SOCIETY FROM SEPT. 1 TILL PRESIDENT RODRIQUEZ'
RESIGNATION ON JAN. 11 SEEMS TO HAVE SUBSIDED. MANY
PROBLEMS CONFRONT THE NEW GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, AND AS IT
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